

# Self-Advocacy Guide for Fieldwork and Outdoor Professionals



## Why Self-Advocacy Matters

Fieldwork and outdoor professions come with unique challenges, from physical demands and safety risks to inclusivity and work-life balance. Advocating for yourself ensures that you have the support, resources, and respect needed to do your best work while maintaining your well-being.

## 1. Know Your Rights and Responsibilities

- **Workplace Protections:** Familiarize yourself with labor laws, workplace safety regulations (e.g., OSHA standards, institutional policies), and field-specific guidelines.
- **Code of Conduct:** Understand your institution's or employer's policies on harassment, discrimination, and workplace expectations.
- **Field Safety:** Know your right to refuse unsafe work and demand proper training, personal protective equipment (PPE), and emergency planning.

## 2. Communicate Your Needs Clearly

- **Before Fieldwork:**
  - Discuss accessibility needs, safety concerns, and necessary accommodations (e.g., rest breaks, physical accommodations, dietary restrictions).
  - Clarify responsibilities and decision-making processes in the field.
  - Request **detailed itineraries and emergency protocols** in advance.
- **During Fieldwork:**
  - Speak up if conditions become unsafe or expectations are unclear.
  - Advocate for fair workload distribution and reasonable working hours.
  - Assert boundaries regarding personal space, workload, and communication styles.
- **After Fieldwork:**
  - Provide feedback on conditions and suggest improvements.
  - Document and report any incidents of concern (e.g., unsafe conditions, harassment).

## 3. Advocate for Inclusivity & Accessibility

- **Field-Friendly Accommodations:** Request adjustments that allow you to participate fully (e.g., modified gear, flexible schedules, gender-inclusive facilities).

- **Representation & Support:** Encourage inclusive hiring, mentoring, and training for underrepresented groups in field sciences.
- **Speak Up About Bias:** If you experience or witness discrimination, document it and report it through proper channels. Seek allies who can support advocacy efforts.

#### 4. Ensure Personal Safety & Well-Being

- **Physical & Mental Health:**
  - Prioritize hydration, nutrition, and rest during fieldwork.
  - Address mental health needs by planning debrief sessions or seeking support.
  - Have a plan for handling medical needs in remote locations.
- **Personal Safety Precautions:**
  - Establish a **check-in system** with colleagues or emergency contacts.
  - Trust your instincts—if something feels unsafe, voice your concerns and take action.
  - Carry necessary safety tools (e.g., first aid kits, GPS, communication devices).

#### 5. Build a Support Network

- **Find Allies & Mentors:** Connect with colleagues, advisors, and organizations that support self-advocacy in the field sciences.
- **Join Professional Organizations:** Groups like the Society for Conservation Biology, Women in Science, or The Field Inclusive can provide resources and advocacy support.
- **Peer Advocacy:** Support fellow fieldworkers in addressing challenges collectively—there is strength in numbers.

#### 6. Document & Report Issues When Necessary

- Keep a **written record** of incidents (date, time, location, details).
- If an issue arises, **report it to the appropriate authority** (supervisor, HR, university, or professional organization).
- Seek **legal or institutional support** if your concerns are not addressed properly.

#### Final Thought: Your Voice Matters

Self-advocacy is not just about protecting yourself—it's about creating a safer, more inclusive, and more equitable field for everyone. By standing up for your needs and supporting others, you help shape a better work environment in the natural sciences.

**Need help?** Reach out to advocacy groups, workplace representatives, or mentors in your field.